

News from Ed Markey

United States Congress

Massachusetts Seventh District

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CONTACT: Colin Crowell

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(202) 225-2836

MARKEY, TAUZIN JOIN FORCES ON CABLE TV BILL

Proposal gives local communities option for continued rate regulation beyond March 1999

WASHINGTON, DC - The leaders of the House Telecommunications panel responsible for cable television policy joined forces today to propose legislation to promote competition and provide consumer protection against rate gouging following the March 1999 date for rate deregulation in current law. Rep. Ed Markey (D-MA) (ranking Democrat on the Telecommunications subcommittee) and Rep. Billy Tauzin (R-LA) (Chairman of the Telecommunications subcommittee) unveiled their proposal at a Capitol Hill news conference.

"We do not have anything remotely close to a competitive cable marketplace today," noted Markey. "Yet unless Congress acts, the regulation of cable monopolies will end early next year and there will be no competitive check on price gouging in most of our communities."

The bill has three parts:

1. It promotes competition by preventing exclusive programming deals by incumbent monopolies that deprive potential alternative providers from obtaining the programming they need to compete.
2. It promotes competition by establishing a low-cost programming tier of local broadcast channels.
3. It permits a local franchise authority to retain the protection of federal regulation if it determines that the local cable monopoly is not offering an acceptable range of programming choices.

"Federal cable regulation needs to be strengthened significantly," Markey concluded. "But in the meantime, we should make it clear to cable consumers that we do not intend to take down the federal regulatory umbrella completely in the absence of effective competition."

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